

City of Brunswick Frequently Asked Questions – Water Discoloration, Water Quality, Hydrant Flushing & Water Pressure

Discolored Water

Why do we sometimes experience discolored water?

Discolored water can be the result of dead end water lines, aged water lines, tuberculation (build-up) in water lines, and major water usage at fire hydrants, to name a few. Additionally, when Yourtee Springs was taken offline, the flow of water in those lines was reversed (i.e. instead of water from Yourtee flowing east towards Brunswick, Potomac River water was pushed west towards Washington County). This reserve flow can disrupt tuberculation in pipes and cause discolored water.

Why is my water discolored for a few minutes before clearing up when it hasn't been used for several days?

Just like the City is experiencing aging infrastructure and water lines, many of the older homes also have original or old piping in their homes or in the service lines to their homes. We have found that many homes still have a galvanized water service line that may be tuberculated. When unused water sits in the lines for an extended period of time, the tuberculation discolors the water. After it runs a few minutes, fresh water enters your line, and the water runs clear. This is similar to the problems the City experiences on aged main water lines and why we complete our flushing schedules to keep water lines clear.

Is discolored water safe?

Brown, yellow, reddish brown, or white cloudy drinking water caused by dissolved solids, air, or buildup in the pipes breaking loose has no ill health effects. Chlorine is introduced into the water system for disinfection per Maryland State requirements.

What is the City doing to address water discoloration?

Utilizing State bond and grant funding, as well as budgeted funds, the City replaces or re-lines aged water lines yearly. Dead end lines are eliminated whenever those lines can be looped to the system. Additionally, the City conducts routine fire hydrant flushing maintenance through the year. The City recently acquired \$6 million in bonds where almost half was dedicated to water and sewer infrastructure projects. We also continue to engage with state and county agencies to discuss our situation and request assistance and reviews of our processes for suggestions and assistance.

Is there anything I can do to prevent discolored water from spreading throughout the lines in my home?

If you notice discolored water, it is best to run an outside spigot or a bath tub or laundry tub for several minutes before running other faucets to prevent water from entering your water heater and various lines within the house. Once discolored water enters the various water lines in your home, instead of just your main service line, each line would need flushed individually to clear up the discolored water from those lines. Additionally, homeowners can install filters on their service line after the water meter.

Why can't the City provide cheaper rates or adjustments on my bill for periods where my water is discolored?

Water and sewer rates are designed to be spread to all utility system users through the City's Enterprise Fund. Maintenance costs are factored into these rates when they are set. All water that flows through the system was treated and distributed, whether it then became discolored or not. The costs associated with treating and distributing that water were real costs, and cannot simply be removed or absorbed by other funds. The City is unable to adjust bills for periods of discolored water because that cost would be the responsibility of all other utility customers to absorb.

Does discolored water affect the City's water storage tanks?

Issues that cause discolored water occur after water has left the storage tanks. Tank inspections are conducted annually.

Does Yourtee Springs being offline add to the discolored water issue?

Yes. Water from Yourtee Springs flows east towards Brunswick. When Yourtee was taken offline, water from the Potomac River was then pushed west towards Washington County to supply those users with potable water. The flow being reversed causes build up in the pipes to break free since the water is flowing in the opposite direction. Also the flow and pressure have been reduced on the water main in Washington County which affects the effectiveness of hydrant flushing in those areas.

Water Quality

Is Potomac River water considered hard and how might that affect my house?

Potomac River water is considered to be hard water. The City treats for this by way of oxidation with potassium permanganate, adsorption media in the clarifiers, and mixed media filters. The City has tested for Iron and Manganese in the water in the past and levels were not very high. Another round of testing is being conducted currently for Iron, Manganese and Calcium. The iron we see in the system is most-likely being introduced by the old iron pipes. Whole house filters, water softeners, and reverse osmosis systems can be installed by homeowners to lower hardness. The filters and reverse osmosis systems will also remove color and sediment.

Does the City regularly test its water?

Yes. Water Plant staff monitors water quality while the plant is in service with continuous monitoring for turbidity and chlorine levels. Water pH is tested hourly. Alkalinity, hardness, temperature, and clarifier turbidities are tested every four hours. Color is tested daily. The City follows state and federal sampling guidelines. A Bacteriological sampling site plan is used and updated annually. Various other samples are taken as required by state and federal law.

Is there a routine Water Quality Report conducted?

Yes. The consumer confidence report is completed annually and is available for inspection on the City's website.

Can residents have water samples taken by a third party?

Yes. There are several labs in the area that can take samples. The City uses Frederick Towne Labs

in Myersville, MD. A licensed sampler must perform this sampling.

If the Potomac River is flooded or muddy will it affect water quality at my home or business?

No. The Water Treatment Plant is equipped to handle all river conditions. This will not affect the quality of the plant effluent water.

Hydrant Flushing

Why does the City conduct fire hydrant flushing?

Fire hydrant flushing is conducted quarterly to rid the water lines of sediment that collects and gets distributed throughout the system.

How can I prevent discolored water when the City is flushing hydrants?

Avoid using water during hydrant flushing if possible. Advanced notice is provided on the City's website and social media page.

What should I do if there is discolored water flowing from my tap after maintenance work or hydrant flushing in my area?

Discolored water is a natural by-product of flushing the system and one of the reasons the City flushes. If you notice discolored water, it is best to run an outside spigot or a bath tub or laundry tub for several minutes before running other faucets to prevent water from entering your water heater and various lines within the house.

Water Pressure

Why does my water pressure change or drop suddenly?

Pressure drops may happen if you have a pressure reducing valve that may not be working correctly. This could cause your pipes to make sounds and lower your water pressure.

Why do I have sufficient water pressure one moment and low pressure the next?

In most cases this is caused by an old galvanized water service line to your home causing a reduced flow. In some rare cases the City's water meter screen may be clogged and require the City to clean it.

As always, these are common issues observed by City staff. If you feel you have a different issue happening at your home or would like to discuss any of this information further, please contact City Hall at 301-834-7500 or CityHall@BrunswickMD.gov during normal business hours. Report after-hours emergencies by contacting 301-834-7500 to be connected with the on-call personnel.